

Opening Statement

Rep. Bart Gordon

Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science

Hearing: NOAA's GOES-R Satellite Program

September 29, 2006

We are here this morning to hear testimony on NOAA's plans to acquire the next series of geostationary environmental satellites - the series known as GOES-R.

The GOES satellite pictures are a familiar sight to anyone viewing a weather forecast. These satellites are essential to monitoring the development of severe storms. Whenever a hurricane is threatening our coastal areas, it is the GOES images that we see of the eye and the rotating clouds of the storm.

We simply must ensure continuity of this satellite information to maintain our ability to accurately forecast the weather.

We are still at a very early stage of this program. We have an opportunity to take steps to avoid problems with this acquisition such as the problems we are experiencing with the polar satellite procurement - NPOESS. We simply cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the polar program.

The Administration has taken initial steps to obtain realistic cost estimates and to determine the degree of technical difficulty associated with the planned sensors for this system. The Administration has also taken steps to hire technical experts and to establish an executive oversight committee for this program. I commend you, Admiral Lautenbacher, for these actions.

However, as David Powner of the Government Accountability Office will testify this morning, additional steps must be taken to limit risks of cost and schedule overruns.

We expect to see a realistic cost estimate for this program before a system contract is awarded. We expect a realistic assessment of the technical challenges associated with the development of the sensors and adequate reserves to be put aside to deal with the problems that will inevitably arise.

Finally, we expect the Executive Committee overseeing this program to pay attention to its development and to act decisively and expeditiously when problems are identified.

I would like to thank David Powner and the member of his GAO team for their fine work and assistance to the Committee in our oversight of NOAA's satellite programs. The Committee will continue to watch the development of this program closely over the next few years. I hope we can work cooperatively to achieve our common goal of delivering improved weather forecasting to the nation.